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SUBJECT: GHANA ELECTIONS: POLLSTER SEES A SQUEAKER

Classified By: Polchief Gary Pergl for reasons 1.4 B and D

11. (C) SUMMARY. Independent pollster and newspaper editor Ben Ephson predicted that the presidential elections will require a runoff, but that the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) will pick up at least 14 Parliamentary seats to close the gap with the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP), which currently has a 34 seat lead in the 230-seat legislature. He forecast that the 2008 elections will be the fairest ever in Ghana because of the resources the NDC has poured into vetting and training a loyal cadre of polling agents. Ephson said that many journalists are on the NPP payroll, and that in a last ditch effort to gain votes, the NDC might try to out NPP candidate Nana Akufo-Addo as a drug user in the closing weeks of the campaign. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Ben Ephson met with the political section on November 14 to file his monthly report on the \$40,000 DHRF grant he received to do election polling. Ephson is the editor of the independent newspaper Daily Dispatch, and the leader of Ghanalert, an NGO that focuses on election monitoring and public opinion polling. Ephson said that his team had completed its polls in the 3 northern regions and the Ashanti region, and would have results from the rest of Ghana by December 1. He walked Poloffs through each of Ghana's 10 regions, exploring which constituencies would likely change parties and why. Based on his data, he expects the NDC to gain a minimum of 14 Parliamentary seats, while the NPP could lose enough seats to drop below a majority. (NOTE: The NPP currently holds 128 seats, the NDC has 94, and 8 seats are held by minority parties and independents. END NOTE) Ephson is also convinced that the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) candidate will play a spoiler role in the presidential race. He believes that the CPP candidate is drawing the majority of his support from the NPP, although this will not translate into more parliamentary seats for the CPP. Ephson predicts that no party will gain a majority in presidential polling, throwing the election into a runoff likely to take place December 28.

13. (U) Ephson's 2004 polls came closer than anyone's to predicting the outcome of that election, but his methodology is far from scientific. For his polls on the presidential election, he sends pollsters through targeted markets and neighborhoods with a set of 12 questions, starting with delivery of services such as water and electricity, and ending with "who do you think will win the election?" His field workers randomly survey 200 voters in each parliamentary constituency. He claims that his margin of error in presidential polling is plus/minus four per cent, but his logic is hard to buy.

14. (U) For Ephson's parliamentary picks, however, his predictions appear to be based on sounder research. He pointed out constituencies in which the NDC had paid for an independent to run and siphon votes from a vulnerable NPP candidate, and other areas where NPP intra-party rivalries could lead to NDC wins. Ephson sees the NPP potentially

losing six out of its eight current seats in the Northern Region and five out of its sixteen seats in Greater Accra. He predicts that the NDC will also pick up seats from two smaller parties, the Peoples' National Convention (PNC) in the Upper West Region and the CPP in Central Region. Ephson felt confident enough to name NPP constituencies in Accra that he felt were vulnerable. He also noted that in Ashanti Region, the heartland of the NPP, a number of independents were contesting seats. These candidates were historically NPP, but lost out through the party's sometimes bitter parliamentary primary process to less appealing candidates. Ephson predicts that the NPP will see, at best, a much reduced majority.

15. (U) In 2004, Ephson said, the NPP gained thousands of fraudulent votes because of NDC's lack of vigilance at the polling stations. This year, he said, the NDC was training teachers, students, professionals and other literate party faithful to act as polling agents at all 22,000 polling stations. He predicted that these trained party agents would make this the fairest election in Ghana's history.

16. (C) Ephson also said that the NPP was imploding in the final weeks of the campaign. President Kufuor has not been campaigning actively on behalf of NPP aspirant Nana Akufo-Addo, who was not his choice of candidates. Akufo-Addo, according to Ephson, was irritated that Kufuor chose last week to formally unveil the newly-built and sumptuous Presidential palace, a project that many Ghanaians associate with political excess. When asked if there might be a "November surprise," Ephson said that he expected the NDC, which has already been hinting at NPP connections to

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Ghana's burgeoning narcotics trade, might decide to openly accuse Akufo-Addo of being a drug user.

17. (C) The NPP, according to Ephson, had offered him 30,000 Ghanaian Cedis (\$25,000) to publicly tilt his polls towards their party, an offer he refused. Other journalists, he said, are on a virtual retainer from the NPP. He also told Poloffs that the NPP had approached the cash-strapped PNC party and offered to pay for their polling agents, a proposal they sensibly declined. Finally, he said that the NPP was paying students in Cape Coast 100 Cedis to transfer their votes in an attempt to elect an NPP member as Parliamentarian from that key constituency.

18. (U) COMMENT. For a supposedly independent pollster, Ephson is hardly impartial in his personal politics, admitting openly to being an Nkrumahist and member of the CPP. His vote for CPP candidate Paa Kwesi Nduom might be a wasted vote, he said, but he hopes that it sends a message to both major parties. Ephson's predictions on Parliamentary elections sound plausible, but as noted in previous cables, any authoritative prognostication on the outcome of the presidential elections strikes us as suspect at best.  
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